

Mourning in America

by the editors

“Don’t mourn. Organize!” — Joe Hill

The day after Trump’s election we met friends and family who expressed their shock and fears in intensely personal ways. One thought war, nuclear and/or cyber war was now inevitable: perhaps she should stock up on survival supplies. A recently retired guy feared the end of affordable healthcare and that insurance companies would revert to excluding people with pre-existing conditions, himself included. Another, having recently gained citizenship, said her daughter, who had grown up in the United States but who was not yet a citizen was afraid she might be sent back to their original country. A trans friend thought all equality for LGBTQ people was under immanent threat, including her decade-old marriage. A complete reversion of women’s reproductive rights seemed likely, leading to a return to a time of underground abortion networking.

After 18 months of electoral rumble and tumble, the People (or at least those who decide to vote) of the United States have spoken and made their choice. But the fundamental problems, both political and social, exposed as open sores remain. And sorting out what’s next and what realignments might take place is a priority.

Our own core position has been the same all along. With an empire in decline, Presidential electoral politics is at present a barren field when the choices are between two versions of neoliberalism. The central task for radicals is to cultivate the base, work locally, build realistic coalitions, and progress where openings appear. Economic issues, essentially class politics, remain the fundamental basis for a radical agenda. The failure of the two candidates to provide convincing leadership to reverse economic inequality left voters with no effective choice, and many, obviously the white working class in particular, now awakened as an aggrieved identity group, chose the guy who they didn’t respect or even trust, but who was an outsider and might change something. It was less hope than desperation for the declining working and stagnant middle classes. And Trump’s bullying style and slogan rhetoric opened the way for open racism, nativism, nationalism, and sexism. Trump needed the Alt-Right to win; he doesn’t need them in order to govern. But the door has been opened.

Of course, any mildly thoughtful person of anywhere on the political spectrum could see that Trump was all bluster and bluff and lies. No real “wall” will be built. Just as Reagan granted universal amnesty to the undocumented and promised rigorous enforcement of hiring to stop illegal migration, enforcement never happened: industry needed cheap labor. Bringing back manufacturing to the rust belt won’t happen: technology has changed the skills and size of the workforce while industrial unions, the real protection workers had, have been decimated. The Clinton Presidency pushed free trade and NAFTA, admitting that deindustrialization meant the workforce would have to be retrained for a new economy to have good jobs. But it never happened. The blue collar labor force lost their family wage jobs and could only find work at Walmart and the rest of the low wage and precarious retail and service sector. Home loan and tenuous mortgage

failures drove people from their houses into trailer parks and homelessness.

Despite the slogans, curbing banks, reigning in financial capitalism, halting globalization, and saving small farms and businesses will not be carried out by Trump's coterie of advisors and the Republican elite who immediately on his win trumpeted cutting individual and corporate taxes, deregulating commerce, encouraging conglomeration; all of which restrict competition. And obviously there is no simple solution to the dilemmas of US foreign policy in a time of continuous and uneven imperial decline. No one can ever win an endless "war on terrorism" and the situation in the Middle East can't be fixed by a Trumpian magic bullet of bombing civilians, waterboarding prisoners, or sealing the borders to any and all Muslims.

In this light, the Bernie Sanders campaign gave hope for mobilizing younger people. But class issues are always inflected with evolving social and cultural currents. Thus the remarkable tide of our time is seen in Black Lives Matter and a resurgent movement for racial and gender equality. Locally grounded work, coalitions and alliances, concrete plans, overcoming superficial antagonisms among progressives while learning anew to respect differences and priorities is the task for this new terrain. But we've been there before.

In 1981, at the beginning of the Reagan era, we wrote an editorial about radical cultural work: <http://www.ejumpcut.org/archive/onlinessays/JC26folder/EdlRadCultWkNow.html>. We were responding to the first movie star President. Now we have the first Reality TV star President-elect. Media savvy people know just how scripted, edited, and predetermined such dramas are. Time to present a counter-narrative, to tell our story.

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